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Discipleship Requires Discipline, Not Excuses

By Don Overcash

Our culture is awash in excuses. We excuse anger as authenticity, self-indulgence as freedom, and moral compromise as personal choice. But Jesus never invited people to excuse sin; he called them to follow him. And following Jesus requires discipline, especially in an age that treats self-control as repression and holiness as old-fashioned.

The apostle Paul urges believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 to “live a life pleasing to God” and to “abstain from sexual immorality.” That is not the language of casual belief. It is the language of discipleship. A disciple is not merely someone who agrees with Jesus in principle. A disciple is one who learns to obey him in practice.

That includes sexual conduct. Scripture does not treat sexuality as a minor issue. The Bible speaks broadly and consistently about sexual immorality: adultery, fornication, lust, exploitation, pornography, and every form of sexual behavior outside God’s design. God created sex as a good gift, but sin has bent that gift inward toward self. What was meant to express covenant faithfulness and mutual giving is too often reduced to appetite, impulse, and consumption.

That is why sexual sin is never just private behavior. It forms the soul. It weakens self-control. It trains a person to use others rather than honor them. Paul himself said, “I discipline my body and keep it under control” (1 Cor. 9:27). In that sense, sexual immorality is not merely a breaking of rules; it is a distortion of love. Real love seeks the good of another. Sin seeks its own satisfaction.

Followers of Jesus must therefore live differently. They are called to purity, restraint, repentance, and holiness. Jesus himself taught that discipleship means self-denial: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Christians are not free to copy the surrounding culture and then baptize it with religious language. They are to be known as people who take sin seriously, beginning with their own.

This matters because our public witness depends on it. When Christians speak about sexual morality without living with humility and integrity, their words lose force. But when believers pursue holiness with consistency, their lives become a testimony that God’s ways are good. The world does not need more religious outrage. It needs people whose lives demonstrate that obedience to Christ produces freedom, clarity, and peace.

It is especially tragic when church leaders deny that sexual immorality is sin at all. First John warns that “if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:10). When leaders refuse to name sin, they do not show compassion; they invite

self-deception and undermine the authority of God's word. A church that will not discipline sin cannot disciple people well.

At the same time, Christians must learn how to address those whose lives are marked by sexual immorality. The answer is not cruelty, mockery, or self-righteousness. The answer is truth spoken in love. Scripture calls the church to admonish, exhort, and restore, not to flatter sin and not to crush sinners. Jesus modeled this in John 4: when he met the woman at the well, he told her the truth about her life while offering living water. That requires both conviction and compassion. We do no one any favors by pretending sin is harmless. But we must not treat people as problems instead of people

Jesus consistently combined grace with truth. He did not excuse sin, but he did call sinners to repentance with dignity and mercy. That is the model for his disciples. We are to speak clearly about what God has designed, call people away from what destroys them, and do so with the humility that remembers our own need for grace.

In the end, discipleship is not a slogan. It is a way of life. It requires discipline, not excuses. It requires holiness, not compromise. And it requires the courage to say that God's design for sexuality is not oppressive, but good. In a culture that celebrates self-expression above all else, followers of Jesus are called to a higher standard: a disciplined life that is pleasing to God and loving toward others.